TRANSCRIPT—Lillie Early Fite

Fairview Community History Project

Interviewee: Lillie Early Fite

Interviewers: Tealey Ellis and Judith Robertson

Interview Date: 4 October 2018

Location: Interviewee's home, 68 Church Road, Fairview NC

Length: One digital audio file, 16.0 MB, 0:29:25 (hrs:min:sec)

I notice that you were born in South Carolina. When did you come to Fairview?

Lillie Early Fite: My parents lived here. My grandpa was in South Carolina, and I was born in his house.

Tealey Ellis: And when did you come here, what year?

LEF: The same year I was born.

TE: So, you've lived here all your life.

LEF: Yeah.

TE: Tell us your parents' names and where they were born.

LEF: My dad was Dwight G. Early, and he was born in Fairview. My mother was Rosa Early, she was a Norman before she married, and she lived in South Carolina.

TE: And your grandparents' names?

LEF: Wilson Norman, and my grandmother had died.

TE: What kind of work did your parents do?

LEF: My dad did painting, and my mother didn't work. She worked fulltime at home.

And that is a job, isn't it?

LEF: It is.

TE: No pay for it, but it is a job, nonetheless. When did you move to this neighborhood, and how long have you lived in this neighborhood in Fairview?

LEF: We've lived in this house about sixty years, I guess. We moved here in '58.

TE: And your children were born, not in this house, but in Fairview?

LEF: One of my children was born in Statesville, North Carolina.

TE: You said you had been here sixty-some years

LEF: In this house

TE: In this house. So, growing up in Fairview, what are your memories of Fairview as a child and when you were in high school.

LEF: We lived in, it was called Hollywood Road when I was growing up. And then they changed the name to Sugar Hollow Road. But I lived on Hollywood Road until I was about eleven. Daddy sold our house and we moved to Asheville. And then he joined the Navy and left, left Mama with seven kids, so we moved back to Fairview. We rented in Fairview until he came out of the service, and then he bought a house.

TE: What memories of school do you have?

LEF: I was scared to death in the first grade. I didn't know anything about school, but I had a cousin that helped us all. She was about six years older.

TE: Did you have brothers?

LRF: Yes, I had brothers, one older, and all the rest were younger. I had seven brothers.

TE: They didn't by any chance scare you about school, did they?

LEF: No, they didn't like school either. I always liked school.

TE: What did you like about it?

LEF: Seeing people and learning.

TE: Any particular teachers you remember, from elementary school?

LEF: Well, I had Ora Nesbitt the second grade. I remember her, because I was afraid she'd whip me. She always whipped you if you missed spelling words. She'd pat your hand with a ruler. But most of the teachers were Nesbitts that taught at Fairview School.

TE: I hadn't heard that before, that's interesting. They had a monopoly there on the jobs, I guess. What kind of events from elementary school do you remember, like a special, a holiday time

LEF: I remember going on a hike one time and going way up on Hollywood Road. We walked from school, the whole class, and had a picnic.

Any special reason, it was just a nice day?

LEF: Just a nice day.

TE: How nice, I like that, that's great. What about high school, what was that like?

LEF: I always liked school, and I went to Fairview School until the eleventh grade and then I moved to Oakley, and I went to Oakley one year. Then I quit and took home school and finished school.

TE: Any particular events in high school that stand out in your mind? Sports or activities?

LEF: I used to go to the football games, but I never learned how they scored or anything. Freeze to death at the football game.

TE: Well, I never liked football much in high school, so maybe I did what you did. I learned to cheer when my school was cheering. That seemed to work, but

maybe it was a more social thing, than for the sports, overall. What kind of things out of school as a teenager for activities and recreation did you do?

LEF: We went skating at Rec Park, I loved to skate. Mostly we just worked at home in the garden.

TE: What about church activities, any

LEF: We went to church, but there weren't any activities, just Sunday morning.

TE: Was there an annual homecoming dinner at church?

LEF: Um-hm

TE: And when was that usually held, what month?

LEF: In August, I think, up at Pleasant Grove

TE: And that's where you went to church?

LEF: Um-hm.

TE: You mentioned that your father had joined the military and was gone for a while. So, this would pertain to him and to your parents as well, I suppose. What kinds of crops did you all grow?

LEF: Corn and beans and squash and tomatoes, carrots and okra. We grew about everything, and then Mama canned everything.

TE: Did you help her?

LEF: Um-hm. I learned to can, but mostly I babysat.

JR: But you were raising the food you were going to eat, not sell.

TE: Did you have animals as well? Cows, chickens?

LEF: Mama had a cow, and we had chickens, a pig

JR: You had your own milk.

LEF: Yeah, yeah

TE: What do you remember about, you just said you had a hog. What do you remember about hog-killing time? Was that a big event?

LEF: Not for me, the neighbors came and helped. But it was mostly uncles. Mostly family.

TE: Do you remember if the women in the family were doing anything like rendering the fat and making lard

LEF: Yeah, meatloaf and—not meatloaf, liver mush

TE: I have to look into how you make liver mush. Was there anyone that your family ever hired to help with any farm work? Or did you all do it all yourself?

LEF: I don't remember hiring anybody for farm work, but they hired somebody when Mama had a baby. This Louenna, what was her name, Edgerton. She was a black woman and she came and helped us.

TE: Did she stay in the home with you, or just come during the day?

LEF: You know, I don't remember, but then one of my brothers was born in Asheville, we had a black woman come stay with us, and her son came with her. He was maybe eleven or twelve.

TE: Have you any idea how long she stayed?

LEF: A week, I think.

JR: Did the cooking and the cleaning?

LEF: Yeah.

TE: That sure was a help. Looking back over the years and even to today, what do you think are the best parts of living in Fairview for you?

LEF: You knew everybody, that was one thing. Now you go to the store you don't recognize anybody. It's a lot of new people have moved in, which is good, but I don't know them.

TE: Yes, I'm one of those. That kind of leads in to where I'm going next, as to how the neighborhood has changed. The neighborhood you're living in now today, has it changed a lot?

LEF: You don't know your neighbors' names. I don't know who lives up there. I know the ones next door, I know their names. But used to you knew who lived in every house, and every car went by you knew who it was.

TE: What are the positive things you think about Fairview today?

LEF: Well, they have a fire department to help.

TE: We just witnessed that this morning

LEF: What else. They have a lot of things at school for the children they didn't used to have. But back when I was growing up, you had to walk everywhere. You didn't have cars to go. But we used to walk to school from where I lived. If there was a special occasion.

TE: What other places did you walk to?

LEF: To church. Daddy had a car occasionally.

TE: Did you ever go into Asheville much when you were child?

LEF: Not much, just when daddy was boarding in Asheville when he was working, and we'd go out there sometimes.

TE: What do you remember about those trips to Asheville as a child?

LEF: I enjoyed them, and you met new people.

TE: Any special treats that you got when you got there, like an ice cream cone?

LEF: No, I don't remember anything. We never had any money.

TE: But you got to see your Daddy.

JR: Did you go to Asheville as a teenager?

LEF: I think it was before I was a teenager. I think I was eleven or twelve, in that age.

TE: What did, talk about your neighborhood back then, what did your neighbors do for a living?

LEF: Most of them were farmers, most of my neighbors were uncles. Uncles and aunts.

TE: In your neighborhood, that you remember as a younger person, was there anyone that stood out as what we today might call a character, someone who maybe liked to storytell and knew a lot of things, told interesting stories? Is there anyone like that that you recall?

LEF: When we used to go to my grandmother's house, they would tell tales, but I don't remember what they were.

TE: Any scary ones?

LEF: Yeah, ghost tales, and then we'd have to walk home in the dark.

TE: As a young woman growing up, living in Fairview, were there any individuals, any people that stood out as leaders, maybe of the community, people who were trying to get things done?

LEF: I don't remember. Don't remember any.

TE: In what ways might you have been involved in the community of Fairview over the years?

LEF: I worked with the children in Sunday School, which I thoroughly enjoyed, while I could remember their names.

TE: So, Sunday School? That's a great way to be involved.

LEF: You met the parents that way. You knew the children, too.

JR: I guess you knew a lot of people at work, too. That was a real social situation, wasn't it? People took an interest in each other.

TE: What was your church like, in size? How many people do you think were members of your church?

LEF: Probably maybe fifty or so, at Pleasant Grove, I can't really remember. I just remember the men sat on one side, and the women on the other.

JR: And the children sat where?

LEF: With their parents.

JR: With their mothers or their fathers?

LEF: Well, you know, I don't remember. Some sat in the choir.

TE: Was the women sitting on one side and the men on the opposite side, was that a rule?

LEF: It was just something everybody did.

TE: Just kind of navigated that way.

JR: When I was little the children sat in the front pews, but they didn't do that in your church.

LEF: No, I can remember sitting back in the back of the church, or middle ways back. Daddy was the psalm leader, and I remember sitting back halfway back in the church, Mama hardly ever got to go to church, she had a baby every two years.

TE: So, she had her hands full, didn't she? How long do you think the services were at your church?

LEF: Till about twelve

TE: And it started at...

LEF: What, ten? I don't know.

TE: So, a couple of hours.

LEF: Yeah, yeah. I don't remember when it started.

JR: Children don't know that kind of stuff, do they?

TE: What kinds of stores, maybe I should ask if you remember going to any kinds of stores in Fairview?

LEF: We went to, it was Guy Merrell's back then, and he had just a variety of things. But we would walk from our house, which was, I don't know, probably two or three miles, wasn't it?

TE: Was it a fun walk?

LEF: Yeah. Back then you never saw a car.

TE: So, it was pretty safe.

LEF: Oh, yeah, you didn't think anything of walking by yourself.

JR: Everybody was doing it.

TE: So, you considered Fairview a safe community then to live in at the time?

LEF: I did, and you knew everybody. You knew who to trust and who not to trust.

TE: Was there ever any crimes committed that you heard about, knew anything about?

LEF: No, not really.

TE: Do you think Fairview is still a safe community today?

LEF: Not that safe. I keep my doors locked all day.

TE: As an adult woman, when did you begin to feel that, or notice that change?

LEF: When I worked at CP Clare I'd go to work and leave the house open all day. But then it was while I was working there that it started to be, things happening that you knew you better lock your doors.

TE: And that would have been what years roughly?

LEF: I was trying to think when I quit work. See, when I left CP Clare, I went to CTS and worked five years. I think I quit CTS about in '91 maybe.

TE: So late '80s, around that time period, early '90s, was when you began noticing changes in the community?

LEF: Um-hm.

TE: What do you think brought those changes on?

LEF: I think it's drinking and drugs.

TE: Was there bootlegging going on?

LEF: It was always going on, I think. We used to hear rumors, I never saw it happen. Elections, they'd give them a drink to vote their way.

TE: I've heard of that too where I grew up. Do you remember any restaurants in Fairview, as a younger woman?

LEF: No.

TE: What about when 74 was changed to a four-lane highway. What did you think about that?

LEF: Well, there was so much traffic it had to be changed, didn't it? You go to Asheville now, it's always traffic. It didn't used to be.

JR: Did you drive yourself?

LEF: Um-hm. Yes, I still drive.

TE: So when it was just a two-lane, when 74 was a two-lane highway, you began to see a lot of traffic

LEF: Traffic was backed up, especially coming by the school on Friday night, you couldn't get through there. You'd have to go another way.

TE: So, do you think most people saw the widening of 74 to four lanes as a good thing?

LEF: A lot of people complained about it, but I thought it was a good thing.

TE: You know why or what they were complaining about?

LEF: No, just change.

TE: Change is hard sometimes. What about over the course of your life and memories that you can recall as a young child, teenager, young woman, of any major catastrophes happening in Fairview, like fires, floods, anything of that nature?

LEF: No, but before I was born they had a flood, there was a Fairview mill down here in the creek, and the flood washed it away.

TE: And that was before you were born.

LEF: In 1916.

JR: That's when the big flood happened in Asheville, too.

LEF: I've got a picture of that, I've got the original picture, but I can't find it. I've got a copy there.

TE: Maybe when we're finished, if I could take a picture of that picture? That would be great, and that could be something that could go in the archives in the North Carolina Room.

LEF: I've looked and looked through my original pictures, but I don't have it. And we had a Fairview Inn down here that I had a picture of, and a schoolhouse on this road.

TE: What was the name of the schoolhouse on this road?

LEF: This used to be College Street through here, I don't know what the name of the school was, but it was right on this side of the church.

TE: So, before the Fairview Elementary School came along, were there individual little schools throughout?

LEF: I think there was, I think there was one there, one up Old Fort Road somewhere

TE: I think so but I'm not sure.

LEF: I can't remember

TE: So that changed, when you would have been, when you started school, you were born in '31, so when you were six or seven years old, that had changed and it was Fairview Elementary then. So up until roughly that time there were individual elementary schools.

LEF: Um-hm.

TE: You mentioned that your father had joined the military, anything about his military experience or memories of anything he might have told you?

LEF: He traveled from New York to Cuba, and he sent pictures home of Cuba. It was a terrible place, you know. But he never did talk much about it.

TE: And how long was he

LEF: He was in the service two years, I think.

TE: What about stories that you might have heard from older family members about the Depression.

LEF: So, you see I was born in the Depression. We just didn't have anything unless you got out and made it yourself.

TE: When you were a little older, though, do you recall any stories of, people have memories of all sorts of things in their lifetime, and I was just wondering if there was any Depression-age memories that might have been shared with the family?

LEF: I don't remember any.

TE: Were there any doctors in Fairview that you recall.

LEF: Dr. Lynch was in Fairview, and Dr. McCracken, was that his name? It was across from the school.

TE: Where was Dr. Lynch's office, do you know?

LEF: I think it was up there on Charlotte Highway. Do you know where Dr. Hamilton had an office? It was up in that area.

TE: Do you know if doctors during that time period made any house calls?

LEF: I don't know of any, but my sister had diphtheria, and a doctor from Asheville came to our house. But first she went to Fletcher Hospital, but they sent her home, because they didn't have anywhere to keep her, because you know, it was contagious.

TE: Was your house quarantined?

LEF: Yes.

TE: I had scarlet fever as a child, and our house was quarantined too, so I understand that very well, not wanting it to spread. Do you ever remember hearing any stories from grandparents or uncles, people from older generations than you, about the old days in Fairview? What they would have called the old days in Fairview? Maybe of how they got around, transportation or things they did?

LEF: One of my cousins told me that him and my uncle come to help my daddy build our house before I was born. They used to go out in the tobacco fields to get them some tobacco. And they got, somebody come out and they were afraid they were going to get shot and slept in the tobacco patch.

TE: Must have been very scared.

LEF: Yeah. Back then they'd shoot you over nothing. If you're stealing from them.

JR: Was hunting a big thing in your family?

LEF: No. My uncle did, but Daddy never did.

JR: So that wasn't a major food source.

LEF: No. My uncle did coon hunting, and the dogs would bark all night.

TE: Are there any areas, any memories that you have that I might not have asked about, or something you'd like to share about living in Fairview, your experiences that we haven't asked you a question about? I'd love to hear it if you do.

LEF: We just had a lot of fun getting with our cousins, because we weren't allowed to play with them that much. We'd slip in the pasture and play.

TE: What kind of games did you play?

LEF: Mostly we'd just talk, because we didn't get to see each other that often. But we'd go hunt the cows, we knew where the cow was, we'd go the other direction.

TE: So you could be out there a little longer.

JR: Is this when you were a child.

LEF: Um-hm.

JR: So, you were really surrounded by your family.

LEF: Yeah. Aunts and uncles and cousins.

JR: Do you know if all that property had at one time belonged to one of the grandparents and had been subdivided. How did it happen that all of your relatives...

LEF: I think it was my grandpa's, he gave it to the kids.

JR: So it did come down probably through the family.

TE: Well, I appreciate your sitting for this interview and sharing your thoughts and information with us, and when all of this project is finished, all of this information as I said will be down in the Pack Library in the North Carolina Room. I don't know if you use the Internet or your daughter uses the Internet or someone you know, you can access it that way too but that'll be down the road a while

LEF: Cathy could do that. All my grandkids.

TE: So, generations in the future will be able not only to hear your voice and what you say, they'll be able to see your picture as well. And I think that's a pretty neat thing to happen. Thank you so much.

END OF INTERVIEW

Philip Blocklyn, 11 May 2020